

UK legal aid reforms to save less than predicted

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The Government will save less than half of the £270 million it predicts through the proposed reforms to legal aid, and planned cuts will actually result in additional costs for the taxpayer by shifting the burden on to other areas of the public purse, according to a report published today by King's College London.

In his report, *Unintended Consequences: the cost of the Government's Legal Aid Reforms*, Dr. Graham Cookson, from the Department of Management analysed the intended changes to family, social welfare and clinical negligence law, which together account for 85 percent of current civil legal aid expenditure.

Dr. Cookson identified knock-on costs of £139 million per annum meaning the Government will realise approximately 42 per cent of the

predicted savings. These unintended costs will largely be borne by other government departments including a predicted £28 million being shouldered by the NHS each year.

Dr. Cookson said: "This research undermines the Government's economic rationale for changing the scope of legal aid by casting doubt on its claims of realising savings to the public purse.

"Without a trial, it is impossible to say for certain what the impact of the proposals will be, just as it is impossible for the Government to assert that there will be a net saving of £270 million per annum. However, my research suggests that the net savings could be half of those predicted in the Government's forecast."

In substantially reducing the scope of legal aid in three main areas alone: family law, social welfare and clinical negligence, the Ministry of Justice expected to make savings of £240 million. Dr. Cookson's report estimates the costs, to this and other government departments, to exceed £139 million – which would eliminate almost 60 percent of the claimed savings.

Desmond Hudson, CEO of the Law Society, who commissioned the report, said: "The Ministry of Justice has defended swingeing cuts to Legal Aid in civil cases, which will deny justice to thousands, on its need to contribute savings to the [Government](#)'s deficit reduction programme. The Law Society accepts the need to achieve savings, but this report confirms that much of the Ministry of Justice's claimed [savings](#) are being achieved at the expense of other parts of government. This is kamikaze accounting and will do little to tackle the deficit while sacrificing access to justice."

Dr. Cookson concludes: 'I echo the Justice Select Committee's call for the Government to estimate the knock-on costs of these reforms before

legislation is passed."

Provided by King's College London

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